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AUTHOR Moore, Kristin A.
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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes research on the utility of family strength constructs to predict adolescent behavior problems. Three national survey and interview databases were analyzed for this study, the National Longitudinal Study of Youth-Child Supplement (NLSY-CS), the National Survey of Children (NSC), and the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Measures were developed to tap family strengths constructs, including communication, appreciation, religiosity, time together, clarity of roles, commitment to family, and social connectedness. Findings indicated that family strengths were common among all families, regardless of family structure or race. Modest correlations were found between different family strength construct measures. Measures of harsh or strong punishment, marital conflict, and parent-child conflict predicted later behavior problems, with one exception. In the NSFH analyses, socializing with neighbors and friends had a small, positive association with the frequency of adolescent behavior problems. Controlling for socioeconomic variables tended to diminish but not erase the effects of family process variables on behavior problems. In the NSC, parent-child communication predicted all youth outcomes. In the NLSY-CS, family strength measures had little effect on child outcomes once variables such as income, family structure, race, and parent education were controlled. In the disadvantaged sample of the NLSY-CS, family strength measures did not consistently predict children's behavior and self-perceptions. In the NSFH, the most important family strength variable were parent-child time together, parental commitment to the family, and parental encouragement of child's independence. Results suggest that including measure of family processes, such as family strengths constructs, in large-scale national surveys is promising. (Contains 15 references.) (KB)

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Family Strengths and Youth Behavior Problems: Analyses of Three National Survey Data Bases

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SUMMARY

Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D.
Child Trends, Inc.
Washington, DC

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SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS

Introduction

Trends in Child Well-being

As the year 2000 approaches, U.S. policy makers must grapple with the many ways in which the status of children and families has declined or lagged behind national goals in recent years. The number of children in poverty has increased, rising by a million in just one year between 1990 and 1991 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992); one in four U.S. children now live in poverty. Rates of teenage parenthood have risen annually for the last four years, and are substantially higher than rates in other industrialized democracies (Moore, 1993).

A quarter of all U.S. children are born outside of marriage (National Center for Health Statistics, 1993), and half of all children are expected to live in single parent families for at least part of their childhood (Bumpass and Rindfuss, 1979). Of those children living apart from their father, few regularly receive sufficient child support to bring their families above the poverty line (U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 1992). Moreover, AFDC rolls have increased dramatically during the past several years (U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, 1992), and eight and one half million children received AFDC in 1992 (Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Family Assistance, 1993).

Violence, particularly related to drug trafficking, has exploded in numerous U.S. cities. Also, too many students drop out and obtain low scores on the SAT and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 1988).

Sexually transmitted diseases have reached epidemic levels, while problems with immunization and infant mortality have continued at levels higher than either the public or policy makers find acceptable (National Commission on Children, 1993; U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1991; Centers for Disease Control, 1992). While many children continue to develop securely and well, clearly the well-being and development of many other children is being compromised.

Problems with Existing Research About Children

Unfortunately, our capacity to describe these problems exceeds our capacity to understand the factors that explain these disturbing trends, or to develop public or private interventions. This is attributable in part to the inadequacy of current data, both the kinds of family measures available and the samples themselves.

A preponderance of the studies about children and families are based on small and/or non-representative samples. For example, researchers studying the effects of day care and maternal employment have tended to rely on white middle class samples drawn from child care centers, often high-quality, university-based programs. Studies that focus on average day care and studies of day care in low income and minority group samples, with a few recent exceptions, are rare. Similarly, some researchers studying the effects of divorce (e.g., Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980) have focussed on highly selective samples, such as families seeking clinical help. While studies based on delimited samples can be heuristic, they are too often used by researchers and policymakers to generalize to the larger population, where results derived from such sub-groups can be misleading.

Another shortcoming of available research is that studies tend to derive from a particular disciplinary perspective and researchers therefore focus on only a range of predictor variables. For example, researchers may focus on socioeconomic status to predict children's achievement, ignoring both the roles of neighborhood and community context and the role of family socialization practices. Other researchers may focus solely on family interaction patterns, paying little heed to the social context in which families develop these patterns. To inform our understanding of the factors that explain the disturbing trends occurring in children's lives in recent years, we need studies that examine, for example, both family dynamics and "policy" variables in the same models. Such multi-layered analyses would allow us to assess each set of influences, such as the family, the community, and peers net of the other factors as well as in interaction with them.

There is also a real need for prospective studies. Much of what we know about the factors associated with children's well-being is cross sectional in nature. That is, we are merely able to ascertain that a given characteristic is correlated with a particular child outcome. Longitudinal data that permit researchers to examine prospectively the factors and processes that predict to child outcomes are far too infrequent.

Differences in families within income, family structure and race/ethnicity groups often go unexplored. For example, studies of whites tend to be conducted among white middle class families, while studies of blacks tend to be conducted among low income and underclass families. Alternatively, families of varied types may be examined together, so that the processes important in single parent families, for example, cannot

be distinguished from those that characterize two-parent families.

Contemporary research on families and children also tends to take a negative perspective. Studies tend to focus on family pathologies and problems, particularly among adolescents. Studies of normal development and positive family functioning constitute just a minority of the available literature.

The Current Research

The analyses conducted for this project address a portion of these concerns in that they focus on positive family characteristics; specifically, they draw constructs from the "family strengths" literature to examine the development of adolescents from three contemporary U.S. samples. They also assess the implications of family processes for children's development prospectively, as two of the three data bases available for analysis contain longitudinal data. In addition, sub-group differences are examined. Thus, we have gone beyond correlating race and family structure with child outcomes to examine within sub-groups the usefulness of family process measures in explaining children's development. In addition, these analyses employ relatively large, nationally representative samples, elevating our certainty that the results can be extrapolated to the larger society.

Family Strengths Research

Over the years, a number of researchers and writers have focussed on positive family processes and child outcomes. For example, Hill (1971) and Gary (1983) have described the strengths of black families. Moreover, substantial literature is developing that examines the factors that underlie successful development among *vulnerable* or *at risk* youth (Connell, Spencer, and Aber, 1993; Luthar, 1991; Luthar and Zigler, 1991; Dabow and Luster, 1990; Garmezy, 1985; Werner and Smith, 1982). Similarly, the *family strengths* literature has emphasized those positive processes that foster the well-being of children and adults as well.

A weakness of these literatures has been the lack of studies employing representative samples. Strong families have been identified, for example, by nominations from parish priests or local ministers and have tended to be white and middle class (Krysan, Moore and Zill, 1990). Nevertheless, a set of intuitively appealing constructs has been identified, some of which (e.g., communication) overlap with constructs identified from other perspectives. For example, the successful families described by the strong families literature shares many features with the authoritative families described by Baumrind (1971), as families in which parents are warm and caring and who discuss issues and reason with their children. The constructs employed in the family strengths literature to define a successful family include:

- communication
- encouragement of individuals
- appreciation

- religiosity or spirituality
- time together
- adaptability
- clear roles
- commitment to family
- social connectedness

The purpose of the present project is to examine the utility of these *family strength* constructs as predictors of adolescent behavior problems. We approach this task cautiously, because even our initial perusal of the data indicated that the family process measures available in these national data bases are somewhat limited. Moreover, none of the data bases were designed to specifically measure family strengths. Consequently, our capacity to truly test the utility of this paradigm is inherently limited. Nevertheless, testing the constructs, insofar as is possible, is an important task because complete explanatory models of child development must include measures of family process as well as measures of socioeconomic status and social context. In fact, understanding the factors that foster development in all types of families can provide insights into actions and interaction patterns that families can use to strengthen their socialization practices despite inadequate economic resources. Thus, the aim of these analyses is to assess both the utility of these constructs and also the utility of the available data, and to suggest ways that future data collection efforts might improve upon previous efforts.

Three data bases were analyzed for this project. Each data base contained somewhat different measures of family strengths and youth outcomes. A summary of the

family process constructs assessed by each data base is provided in Table 1. While the specific measures varied from one database to another, Table 1 shows that it was possible to operationalize most of the family strengths constructs in each of the data bases.

Results from each of these analyses are presented in separate papers. The purpose of this document is to summarize and synthesize the results of these analyses and provide direction for future research and data development. The three papers are:

Family Functioning and Adolescent Behavior Problems: An Analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households by Brett Brown, Ph.D.

Assessing Family Strengths in the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Child Supplement by Donna Ruane Morrison, Ph.D. and Dana Glei, M.A.

The Effect of Family Strengths on Youth Behavior: An Analysis of the National Survey of Children by Barbara Sugland, Sc.D.

Research Questions

While each paper takes its own approach to the issue, several common questions are addressed.

- Are the family strengths constructs appropriate for varied sub-groups of the U.S. population, including single and two-parent families, blacks and whites, and boys and girls? Are statistically robust measures of family strengths available for these varied groups? In particular, the validity, reliability and predictive utility of family strengths measures across varied family structures are assessed in all three data bases.
- Do the several measures of family strengths occur together? That is, does a single construct underlie the individual measures of family strengths, or

are there clusters of constructs that characterize a strong family?

- Are the measures of family strengths associated with positive outcomes for children? Which characteristics of strong families are more strongly correlated with problem behavior among children and adolescents?
- Do measures of family strengths predict to child outcomes across varied population sub-groups? If there are statistically significant associations between family strengths indicators and children's behavior problems, are they attributable to sample selection? Do associations hold controlling for other social and economic characteristics of families?
- What suggestions might be made for the better measurement of family strengths and family processes in future data collection efforts?

Data

National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Data from the initial wave of the NSFH include 13,014 persons, among whom are over 2,300 households with adolescents between the ages of twelve and eighteen. In-person interviews were conducted with a randomly chosen adult; this person is the parent in the sub-sample examined here. Additional information was supplied by the spouse. A fairly rich array of family process data was obtained, along with measures of child outcomes. However, no data were obtained directly from the adolescent, so only the parent perspective is available. Only the 1987 data were available for these analyses; although data from the second wave completed in 1992-93 will become available early in 1994, the NSFH analyses presented here are cross-sectional.

Three outcome measures are examined in the NSFH: a measure of behavior problems comprised of difficult behavior and personality characteristics, such as being irritable or sad, fearful, and bullies; a measure of more serious behavior problems, such as being suspended/expelled, running away, in trouble with the police; and a scale measuring conflict between parent and child over the youth's dress, friends, money, school, et cetera.

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Child Supplement (NLSY-CS). In this data base, a large, nationally representative sample of youth who were aged 14-21 in 1979 has been augmented with child development data. The youth respondents have been surveyed since 1979, to obtain information about their education and labor market experiences. Beginning in 1986, surveys and assessments of children born to the female respondents have been conducted every other year. Data for the 1986, 1988, 1990 panels are used for children ages 6 to 14 in 1988.

Because this is a sample of children born to a cohort of females aged 21-28 in 1986, the children in the sample all were born to relatively young mothers. Hence, this is a rather disadvantaged sample, particularly the adolescents, whose mothers were quite young when the children were born.

A number of measures of family processes have been added to the NLSY as a part of the child supplement; however, these measures are less rich than those available in the NSFH or the National Survey of Children. The particular strength of this data base for the current analyses is the fact that the surveys are obtained every other year, permitting a prospective analysis of prior family characteristics on later child outcomes.

In addition, indicators of behavior problems were obtained from both the mother and from the child; since mothers may not be aware of all the activities of their adolescents, the availability of child reports represents a substantial asset for this data base as well.

Three outcomes are also assessed on the NLSY-CS, one reported by the mother and two based on child reports. The parent-report measure is a 32-item scale developed by Zill and Peterson (Zill, 1990) based on earlier work by Achenbach, Rutter, Kellam, Langner, and other researchers, that measures acting out behaviors, depressed/withdrawn behaviors, and distractable/hyperactive behavior. The second measure is a child-reported scale that includes behaviors such as lying, damaging property, skipping school, et cetera. The third measure is a self perception profile for children which summarizes the child's assessment of their own general self-worth and academic competence.

The National Survey of Children (NSC). Three waves of the NSC have been conducted, in 1976 when the children were 7-11, in 1981 when they were 11-16, and in 1987 when they were 18-22. In each wave, both the parent and the child were interviewed, and in the first two waves a teacher was also interviewed. For the analyses reported here, baseline demographic and family strengths measures were taken from the second wave of data collection, and except for a wave 2 teacher report, youth outcome measures were taken from the third interview. Five child/youth outcomes are examined: a 32 item Behavior Problem Index (very similar to the version in the NLSY-CS), the CES-D depression scale, youth-reported scale measuring delinquent behaviors in the previous 12 months, youth-reported drug/alcohol/tobacco use in the past 12 months, and a teacher rating of the child's school behavior.

Assessment of the Reliability of the Family Strengths Measures

Overall and Within Population Sub-Groups. Although none of these data bases explicitly includes measures intended to tap "family strengths" constructs, it was generally possible to develop measures that assess many of these constructs with reasonable reliability. In most cases, only a few items were available to construct scales, reducing scale reliability; nevertheless, each data base yielded a number of scales with adequate reliabilities. Other constructs had to be examined with single-item indicators, however; and some constructs could not be assessed at all, particularly with the NLSY-CS. These analyses clearly indicate that, if a particular family process is considered important to assess, multiple item scales need to be developed.

Moreover, before new scales are included in national surveys, the utility of the scale items should be assessed among varied socioeconomic and race/ethnic groups because the nature and importance of various constructs may differ for different types of families. For example, in our analysis of the NSFH, only among step-families and female headed families was the measure "encourages independence" associated with significantly fewer behavior problems; this may suggest either that encouraging independence has a different meaning in other family types or has different effects in other family types. Similarly, communication within the family requires different measures when there is one parent than when there are two, and the significance of social connectedness seems to differ across family types. However, the number of such instances is fairly modest: in general, the various family strengths do seem to be relevant to most family types.

In general, the distributions of mean scores on indicators of family strength suggest that such strengths are common among all families, regardless of family structure or race. When differences were noted, families containing both biological parents tend to have the more positive ranking, particularly on parent-report items; however, given substantial differences in socioeconomic status across the family sub-groups, the relatively minimal differences found in measures of family process could suggest common processes unrelated to income, race, and family structure. However, reliance on overly global measures that may miss differences that do exist could account for the lack of group differences.

Analyses generally indicate that measures of different family strength constructs are significantly and positively correlated with one another; however the magnitudes of the correlations are generally quite modest. Furthermore, none of the factor analyses conducted on any of the data bases indicated the presence of a single underlying construct that could be labelled a "family strength" scale. In fact, factor analyses, within the NSC, suggested several underlying family strengths domains, especially for single parent and minority females. Also, when data from multiple respondents was available, items provided by a given respondent were found to cluster together, suggesting that any given respondent has a unique perspective. This underscores the value of multiple respondents.

The Association Between Family Strengths and Behavior Problems

The most central question for these analyses is whether family strengths affect the incidence of problem behaviors in children and youth across all three data sets. Comparable outcome variables were defined across the several data bases so that, insofar as is possible, the predictive utility of the family strength measures could be assessed.

Correlational analyses do indeed indicate that the presence of varied family strengths is associated with fewer behavior problems among children and youth almost without exception. For example, strong parent-child communication, joint activities, and clear and consistent expectations were all associated with fewer subsequent behavior problems among young adults in the NSC. Similarly, in the NLSY-CS, measures of appreciation, communication, family outings, and social connectedness all predict to fewer subsequent behavior problems among school-aged children. The magnitude and level of significance of the associations varies, and sometimes associations are not statistically significant; but the direction of the effect rarely goes opposite to prediction. That is, the data virtually never suggest that the presence of family strengths is correlated with the more frequent occurrence of behavior problems. (One example of an exception is several correlations in the NSFH analyses, where socializing with neighbors and friends has a small, but positive association with the frequency of adolescent behavior problems.) Measures of harsh or strong punishment, marital conflict, and parent-child conflict, on the other hand, do predict later problems.

These correlations provide clear evidence that family strengths are associated with

child outcomes; specifically, with fewer child behavior problems. However, they do not address the very important question of whether these correlations remain when family background differences are taken into account. Multivariate analyses were therefore conducted on each of the databases to address this question.

Multivariate Models of Family Strengths and Behavior Problems

Controlling for socioecomonic variables, such as parental education, income, race, and family structure, tends to diminish but not erase the effects of family process variables. In general, the family functioning measures continue to have small but significant effects on child and adolescent behavior problems, even after controls for social and demographic variables were included in multivariate models.

In the NSC, parent-child communication is the one family strength that demonstrates a significant influence on all five of the youth outcomes examined, net of background factors. Clear roles also predicts to more positive youth on three of the five measures of behavior problems, while commitment to family and religious training have positive effects on two outcomes, net of control variables in this data base. Parent-parent communication, interestingly, predicts to more problems on three of the five child outcomes. Whether this reflects parents who are preoccupied with each other rather than the child, or reflects instead intense parental communication in response to child behavior problems that are already developing at the time of the 1981 interview, is not clear. This ambiguity does suggest, however, the importance of knowing not just that communication has occurred but something about the content of that communication.

On the other hand, a number of the family strength measures do not predict to any of the behavior problem measures in multivariate models, including appreciation, social connectedness, and family activities.

In the NLSY-CS, the family strength measures have little effect on child outcomes once socioeconomic variables were controlled. In fact, none of the family strength measures consistently affect children's behavior and self-perceptions, though appreciation is important in a number of models. Affection and communication also appear to be promising constructs; but the measures of family processes in the NLSY-CS are quite weak. The lack of effects may reflect the paucity of strong measures of family processed or the limited variability found in the disadvantaged sample of NLSY-CS mothers with school-aged children. Since a goal of examining family strengths, however, is to identify family processes that represent a positive resource for families regardless of their socioeconomic assets, the minimal effects in this sample are important to recognize.

In the NSFH, the family strength variables found to be the most important are those which tap the internal family processes, including parent-child time together, parental commitment to the family, and parental encouragement of independence of the child. The availability of extended family members and family involvement in the community are not found to predict directly to child outcomes in the multivariate models. The effects of involvement in church and family involvement in the community organizations are minimal once other variables are controlled. This pattern suggests at most an indirect effect of such variables. Perhaps, for example external factors such as extended family involvement may affect internal factors such as parent-child time

together, and thus affect the child. Thus external factors that influence more proximal influences could indirectly affect the child outcomes assessed here.

Some of the variables available in the three databases analyzed are not technically a part of the family strengths tradition but represent constructs that have nevertheless been found in other studies to affect children's development. In order to explore expectation that the family strengths measures did not fully tap all dimensions of family functioning, several of these measures are included in the multivariate models not only as control variables, but also as substantive variables. These variables include measures of harsh punishment and family and marital conflict. These measures are included along with socioeconomic controls and are found to have strong negative effects on children's development, net of background factors and measures of family strengths. For example, in the NLSY-CS, though family strength variables are not significant in multivariate analyses, the use of spanking by the parent to discipline their school-aged child predict to subsequent behavior problems. Another negative indicator is that of parental depression. The NSFH contains a revised version of the CES-D depression scale. Higher parental depression is found strongly associated with poorer child outcomes among two biological parent families. Analyses of the NSFH indicate that family functioning measures may be as important as socio-demographic variables in explaining behavior problems. For two of the three NSFH outcomes, adding the full set of family process variables is associated with a near doubling of the variance explained.

A potential problem even with the multivariate models is that many of the family strengths measures, as operationalized in these databases, may be confounded with

family structure. For example, child-related activities and communication may be affected by the number of adults present in the family and their relationship to the child. Moreover, membership in particular family structure categories, such as single parent families, is correlated with attributes such as low parental education and low incomes. To examine the possibility that such selectivity factors are distorting the multivariate results, models are estimated on NLSY-CS data employing selection models (Maddala, 1983) that take both observable and unobservable differences between the groups into account. First a probit model is estimated predicting membership in a continuously married family compared to membership in any other family type. The Inverse Mills Ratio derived from this estimation, the hazard instrument, is then included in the multivariate equation predicting child behavior problems. Results from this equation are found to be about the same as the estimates without controlling for selectivity, both in terms of magnitude and statistical significance. Hence, sample selectivity is not found to be a significant problem for these analyses.

Discussion and Conclusions

Overall, the results from these analyses suggest that including measures of family processes, such as family strengths constructs, in large-scale national surveys is promising. Measures of family processes predict to later behavior problems even when social and economic variables are controlled. Results suggest that parent-child interaction in particular (such as parent-child communication) can affect children's behavior over and above the influence of income, family structure, race, and parent

education. Moreover, family process measures seem to be important within sub-groups defined by family structure and race, as well as in the total sample.

However, the variance explained by family strength variables is quite modest. Several factors may explain the minimal associations found here. The primary reason probably reflects the lack of a theoretical or conceptual framework for the family strengths measures. The constructs were developed and refined by researchers and practioners who tended to first identify successful families and then to identify the characteristics of those families. This process yielded an intuitively meaningful set of family strengths in need of theoretical linkage with the child development and family sociology literatures. Overlaps exists with Coleman's theory of social capital (Coleman, 1988), research on resilient or invulnerable children (Luthar, 1991; Dubow and Luster, 1990; Garmezy, 1985), studies of successful development among at-risk children (Sugland and Hyatt, 1993; Sugland, Blumental, and Hyatt 1993), studies of strong black families (Hill, 1971; Gary et. al. 1983), and child development theories such as the parenting paradigm proposal by Baumrind (1971).

A strong linkage between the insights afforded by the successful families literature and the theoretical perspectives of these other traditions would help identify the gaps on the list of family processes identified in the family strengths literature. For example, one critical role that families may play that is not considered in the family strengths constructs is how parents direct their children into peer activities and friendships. We know that peers play an increasingly important role in children's behavior as they move into the teen years, yet the role of parents in the unfolding of that process has not been

the focus of much research.

A stronger theoretical approach to the development of family strengths constructs would also inform hypotheses regarding which family strengths are important as direct effects and which function indirectly. For example, the effect of religion on children may be transmitted indirectly through family structure or commitment to marriage, or it may function as a direct effect on the child's own standards and values. In addition, theory would inform hypotheses about which family strength constructs, if any, are redundant. For example, are parent-child activities, family religious activities, and religiosity discrete constructs, or do they overlap in part? Similarly, some variables may be important primarily in interaction with other variables. For example, the importance of extended kin may be manifest primarily among single parent families, where they play an essential role supporting the childbearing efforts of a solo parent.

Clear theoretical arguments indicating the mediating mechanisms between constructs and child outcomes are needed more generally. For example, what is it about parent-child communication, family religiosity, and interaction with extended family members and friends that is hypothesized to foster positive child development? Specification of these mediating hypotheses would enable the construction of survey items more likely to assess the intended concept. Thus, to assess the role of parent-child communication, for example, it is necessary to specify whether the construct should be the quantity of communication per se, the occurrence of communication on particular topics such as drugs or behavior, the style of communication, or simply whether the child feels he or she could communicate with his or her parents if a need arose.

Apart from insufficient theoretical development, the family strengths constructs lack adequate measurement in existing national surveys. Indeed, this critique would have to be extended more generally to most measures of family processes in current national surveys. Minimal resources have been devoted to developing scales appropriate for survey administration. Complex, multifaceted constructs such as communication and spirituality are often measured with a single item. Moreover, the validity of items and scales and their underlying constructs in different sub-populations has not been assessed. The role of the extended family and religious institutions, for example, may be quite different in black and single parent families than in white or two biological parent families. Similarly, communication within the family requires different measures when there is one parent than when there are two, and significance of social connectedness seems to differ across family types. However, the number of such instances where a construct is relevant for only one family type is fairly modest: in general, the various family strengths constructs do seem to be relevant to most family types. The need is for development of scale items appropriate in varied types of families which will create more valid and reliable scales. To fully understand the role of family processes apart from family socioeconomic resources in shaping the development of children will require an investment in measure development.

These analyses have also underscored the importance of multiple respondents. In particular, obtaining the perspective of the child or youth on family processes and on their own behavior seems to be essential. In addition, the importance of nationally representative longitudinal data has been highlighted in these analyses. To be able to

extrapolate findings, representative samples are necessary. To begin to understand causality, longitudinal data are essential. Narrow studies of delimited populations are very helpful for developing constructs and measures. Eventually, however, it is necessary to assess promising constructs with representative data and to test the predictive power of the constructs with longitudinal data.

Ultimately, the value of the present analyses is their systematic examination of promising constructs developed in a particular literature--(family strengths)--using stringent multivariate methods. This interplay across disciplines and methods can enhance our understanding of the processes that underlie child and adolescent development much more rapidly than if narrow specialties work in isolation. These analyses indicate that most of the family strength constructs do affect the development of children and adolescents, net of socioeconomic variables and across varied social groups. At the same time, they indicate a need for theory-driven reliable measures, scale items that are appropriate within varied cultural groups and within different family structures, and variables that assess the critical mediating processes that connect parental inputs with child outcomes.

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Table 1. Availability of Family Strengths and Family Process Measures Across Data Sets

Family Strengths Constructs	**NSC**	**NSFH**	**NLSY-CS**
Communication	√	--	√
Encouragement of individuals	--	--	--
Commitment to family	√	√	--
Religious orientation/training/ attendance	√	√	√
Social connectedness	√	√	√
Ability to adapt	√	--	--
Expressing appreciation	√	--	√
Clear roles	√	√	√
Time together	√	√	√
Other Family Process Constructs	**NSC**	**NSFH**	**NLSY-CS**
Strong punishment/spanking	√	--	√
Mother-partner relationship satisfaction	--	--	√
Parental conflict	--	√	√
Parental agreement about child	--	--	√
Parental depression	--	√	--

The data sets used in these analyses are: The National Survey of Children (NSC); the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH); and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth - Child Supplement (NLSY-CS).

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Table 2. Summary of Results of Multiple Regression Analyses:
Family Strengths, Background Characteristics and Youth Behavior
National Survey of Children Wave III, (1987)

	Direction of Association				
Independent Variable	Behavior Problems	Depression	Teacher Rating of Behavior	Delinquency	Drug Use
Parent-Child Communication	+	+	+	+	+
Appreciation	0	0	0	0	0
Family Activities	0	0	0	0	0
Clear Roles	+	+	+	0	0
Parent-Parent Communication	-	-	0	-	0
Commitment to Marriage & Family	0	0	0	+	+
Social Connectedness	0	0	0	0	0
Religious Training	0	0	+	0	+
Family Adaptability	+	0	0	0	0
Rules & Chores	0	0	0	0	0
Strong Punishment	-	-	0	-	0
Single Parent Family	-	+	0	0	0
Race - Black	0	0	-	0	+
Gender - male	0	0	-	-	0
Fam Income <=$15k	0	0	0	0	0
ADFC	-	0	0	0	0
Family Size 4+	+	-	0	0	0
Parent's Education < 12 yrs	-	0	0	0	0
Fair/Poor Neighborhood	-	0	0	0	0
Marital Disruption	0	0	0	0	0
Mothers AFB <=19	0	0	-	0	0
Age 14+	-	-	0	0	-

Key: "0" = no statistically significant association; "+" = positive influence (i.e., an increase in family strengths is associated with less negative child outcomes); "-" = negative influence (i.e., an increase in family strengths is associated with more negative child outcomes); significance is at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.
AFB=Age at first birth.

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Table 3. Summary of Results of Multiple Regression Analyses: Family Strengths, Background Characteristics and Youth Behavior. National Survey of Families and Households

	Direction of Association		
Independent Variable	Behavior Problems I	Behavior Problems II	Parent/Child Conflict
Family Friendship	0	0	0
Family Within 25 Miles	0	0	0
Church Involvement	0	+	0
Parental Involvement in Youth Organizations	+	0	0
Socialize Outside of Family	0	0	0
Parent-Child Time Together	+	+	0
Commitment to Family	0	+	0
Encourage Independence Among Children	+	0	+
Parental Depression	-	0	-
Two-biological Parent, High Conflict Family*	-	0	-
Step, High Conflict Family	-	-	-
Step, Low Conflict Family	-	-	0
Divorced/Separated Female Headed Family	-	-	-
Never Married Female Headed Family	0	-	0
Single Male Headed Family	0	-	-
Gender of Adolescent: Male	0	-	-
Age of Adolescent	0	-	+
Gender of Parent: Male	0	0	+
Age of Parent	+	0	+
Race/Ethnicity of Respondent:			
Black	+	+	0
Hispanic	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0
Total Family Income	+	0	0
Parental Education: High School +	0	0	-
Family Received Public Assistance	-	0	0
Number of Persons in Household	-	+	0

Key: "0" = no significant association. "+" = associated with fewer behavior problems; "-" = associated with more behavior problems ($p <= .05$).

* For family structure variables, the omitted comparison group is the two-biological parent, low conflict family.

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Table 4: Summary of Results of Multiple Regression Analyses: Family Strengths, Background Characteristics and Youth Behavior. National Survey of Families and Households

Table 4. Summary of Multivariate Analyses Predicting Children's Behavior Problems in 1990

	Ages 6 to 9	Ages 10 to 14	
	Mother-reported BPI (Table 19, Col.4)	Mother-reported BPI (Table 20, Col.4)	Child-reported Behavior Problems (Table 21, Col.4)
Family Strengths			
Appreciation	-	o	-
Interviewer-evaluated communication	-	o	o
Family discussion of TV	o	-	-
Family outings	o	na	na
Social connectedness	o	o	o
Discussion of sex with parents(s)	na	o	o
Child's religious attendance	na	o	o
Discipline Measures			
Mother-reported rules and chores	o	o	o
Child spanked at least once in prior week	+	+	+
Mother-Partner Measures			
Relationship satisfaction	o	-	o
Conflict	o	+	o
Agreement about child	na	+	o
Communication	-	o	o

Note; Results are from OLS regression models including all family strength measures available for each age group as well as the following controls: child's sex, age and race ethnicity; birthweight in ounces; number of years spent in child care in the first three years of life; indicator of whether child has handicapping condition; child's BPI score in 1988; mother's educational attainment, age at interview and number of children; family income in 1988; percent of previous five years spent in poverty; indicators for whether parents are divorced/separated, deceased, and never married.

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